



Fig. 1 Martha C. Hooton, 1827. Probably Burlington County, New Jersey
Silk on linen, with quilled cream silk ribbon border. 23" h. x 23-3/4" w.

ELEPHANTS IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

by Glee F. Krueger

Adam and Eve, beekeepers and butterflies, churches, houses, horses, hounds, crowing roosters and swimming swans, eagles and emblems, elephants and lady harpists—all these and many more are silken inhabitants in the lively domain of the young American embroideress. Each is represented with charm, humor and skill in the exhibition, "A Gallery of American Samplers, The Theodore H. Kapnek Collection."

Seventy years ago in February 1908, the Corcoran Gallery of Washington, D. C. hosted an exhibition which included samplers from the extensive collection of Alexander W. Drake of New York City. The following year, one hundred of his pieces were shown at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

In October 1978, the Museum of American Folk Art will feature a selection of 112 samplers from the handsome collection of Mr. Theodore

H. Kapnek of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. Among those on view is the appealing example by Martha C. Hooton (fig. 1), 1827, once part of the early Drake collection.

The exhibition has been planned not only to give attention to the beauty and physical properties of the samplers, but to explore and define some of the aspects of the social, educational, geographical and historical world in which this embroidery flourished. Essentially a young woman's domain, the sampler was a means of introducing a girl to basic sewing and embroidery skills. Marking samplers provided a method of learning how to mark one's own household linens, personal clothing and accessories. Marking was a way to identify and to ornament. So this one teaching device became a focus for much that a woman would achieve during her lifetime.

Between 1700 and 1770 the popula-

tion of America more than tripled in size, from 629,000 to 2,148,000. By the mid-eighteenth century, this growth was concentrated in five major seaports: Charleston, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Newport. This urban growth was rapid and large enough to encourage and sustain a cultured society that demanded artistic refinements and leisure pastimes suitable to their newly acquired wealth and position. Within this framework, attention was paid to a genteel education for young ladies. The basis of such pleasant though superficial teaching was the creation of ornamental needlework and the foundation of this was the mastery of the basic sewing skills by means of a working sampler.

In America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there were a variety of schools and preceptresses offering needlework. Though many tedious, but necessary skills



Fig. 2 Barbara A. Baner, 1812. Born at York, Pennsylvania March 20, 1793. Worked at Mrs. Leah Maguier's School, 1812, in Harrisburg. Silk on fine gauze, with hair, opaque paint, and green silk ribbon border, gold braid and metal strips. 18½" h. x 17¼" w.

were introduced at home, the greatest portion of samplers were created in the schools. These ornamentals were tambour, Dresden, printwork, silk embroideries including memorials, coats of arms, or hatchments etc., and canvas embroidered pictures or overmantels. Even quilting, beaded bags and rug work were a part of the repertoire of the nineteenth century school. The majority of samplers in the Kapnek collection are products of these numerous academies, seminaries, or boarding and day schools for young ladies.

One spritely notice in *The Oracle of Dauphin and Harrisburgh* [Pennsylvania] *Advertiser* April 15th, 1793 recorded:

Mrs. M'CURDY,

PROPOSES, this day, to open a school for young Misses, whom she intends to teach Sewing in general, working of Samplers, Sprigging, Flowering, &c.

The price is ~6 per quarter; and parents may depend on the greatest attention being paid to

such children as may be entrusted to her care for tuition.

Her school will be opened in Blueberry alley, near Market-street, Harrisburgh. 15th April, 1793

After Mrs. M'Curdy's notices, there followed several of Mrs. Bell in 1797 and 1799, and a series of advertisements of Mrs. Leah Meguier who directed the work of Barbara A. Baner in her sampler of 1812 (fig. 2).

The Harrisburg newspapers shed new light on this teacher and her school. In *The Oracle of Dauphin and Harrisburgh Advertiser* of April 25, 1803, Isaac Meguier advertised that he had removed to the late tavern occupied by Mr. George Harris, in Second Street, Harrisburg and had opened a public house at the sign of the Lion and Unicorn where he also carried on a boot and shoemaking business. A May 22, 1813 notice in *The Oracle of Dauphin* noted that Isaac Maguire (sic) the boot and shoemaker had removed to the new house of John Close on Locust Street near Doebler's Tavern where he sought continued employment. Below his advertisement, his wife stated,

Mrs. Maguire will likewise continue her school as usual, in teaching all kinds of needlework, music and the first rudiments of common education. She had room for a few more pupils. Harrisburgh, April 9, 1812. (sic)

Various advertisements appeared in *The Oracle of Dauphin* November 18, 1815 and again for a "Mrs. M'Guire's (sic) School, For young Misses," March 20, 1819. *The Pennsylvania Intelligencer* March 9, 1821 recorded, "Receipts and Expenditures In the Treasury of Dauphin County Samuel Pool Esq. Treasurer..." Among those expenses were, "Leah Meguire (sic), teaching poor children 33 40." She received two other payments that year. On April 5, 1822, the *Intelligencer* recorded the opening of her school nearly opposite George Boyer's Tavern. Thursday February 4, 1830, *The Pennsylvania Intelligencer and Farmer's and Mechanics' Journal* stated,

DIED.—On Monday last in this place, Mrs. LEAH M'GUIRE, consort of Mr. Isaac M'Guire.



Fig. 3
Jane Shearer, 1806.
Pennsylvania or New Jersey (?).
Silk on linen. 21¼" h. x 21½" w.



Fig. 4
Maria Bolen, 1816
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
Silk on wool. 20-1/8" h. x 19" w.

The newspapers carried notices of distant schools in addition to those of local Harrisburg schools. The Wilmington, Delaware Young Ladies' Boarding School of Bishop Davenport advertised in the August 25, 1829 issue of *The Pennsylvania Intelligencer*. . . . *Journal* that its curriculum included "Drawing, Painting and Embroidery." This was a practice common in many states. Numerous schools from Baltimore and various areas of Pennsylvania were included in the Harrisburg news, helping to create a lively exchange of pupils. Many of these teachers who advertised had arrived directly from England and helped to perpetuate the English design characteristics and stitchery practices. These women advertised all over the Eastern seaboard, both North, South and inland. Almost thirty schools and teachers are recorded in the selections on exhibit. They represent a fascinating cross-section of educational institutions. While many represent what the child of the affluent family might achieve, others reflect the direction and outlook of the church community such as the work done in the various private Quaker schools of Westtown, the North-School of Philadelphia, and the Boarding School at Nine Partners in Dutchess County, New York. This last school produced samplers similar

in their refinement and quiet restraint to a number of other Quaker school samplers. But the Nine Partners' school also produced one of the most exciting alumna in America in its thoughtful pupil and famous teacher, Lucretia (Coffin) Mott, the Nantucket-born abolitionist and women's rights advocate.

From New York City, a very dainty and pristinely worked sampler shows the results of the Lancasterian method used in the needlework teaching at the Female Association School No. 2 (one of several in the city founded by a devoted Quaker charitable organization). Several of the pupils of this school later taught the black children in the African Free Schools, before both school systems were merged into the New York Public School system.

Many sources of design are in evidence in the Kapnek examples. One sampler of Jane Shearer, 1806, (fig. 3) has a reclining stag at the right which is derived from the 1666 Nuremberg patternbook of Rosina Helena Fürst, *Das Neüe Modelbuch*. . . . Catharine Schrack depended on the etchings of William Russell Birch and engraver Samuel Seymour for her adaptation of Mount Vernon, a theme used by many artists and further adapted for American silk embroideries of the

Federal period. Several actual ink and watercolor patterns for samplers are on exhibit. All designs are either the work of a specific teacher or a willing pupil.

Teachers, students themselves, framers, painters, engravers, pattern-books, engravings sold individually or taken from favorite novels and tradesmen's manuals account for the immense variety as well as the repetition in needlework design themes.

The work of Philadelphia's Maria Bolen (fig. 4) best defines the American idiom in samplermaking, for here, isolated in a single piece are two styles of working. The top half consists of a series of small, scattered design units, which are sharply delineated, with some scale consistency. But the American eagle at the top and the bottom half of the sampler abandon the safe, traditional method. Instead, they boldly explore the expansive country estate and fill it with standing figures, domestic animals and large garden flowers. In spite of this duality, the sampler holds together extremely well and is one of the richest and liveliest pieces in the exhibition. □

Glee F. Krueger is quest curator for this exhibition at the Museum of American Folk Art in N.Y.C.